2/

THE

EPISTLE

FROM THE

YEARLY MEETING

HELD IN

LONDON,

By ADJOURNMENTS, from the 16th to the 25th of the Fifth Month, 1796, inclusive.

To the *QUARTERLY* and *MONTHLY MEETINGS* of *FRIENDS* in *GREAT BRITAIN*, *IRELAND*, and elsewhere.

DEAR FRIENDS,

WE find our minds again engaged to send you the salutation of our love in CHRIST; desiring that, as we have been careful not to address you in formality, nor without a fresh belief that it is our duty, so ye may not consider this our Epistle as a customary matter, nor read it in that disposition that is always seeking after some new thing; but may be willing to consider what parts of it are applicable to your own respective states; and let the expressions of our concern, for your present and everlasting welfare, receive, and retain, a sufficient place in your minds.

The accounts of the sufferings which have been sustained by our Friends in Great Britain, and are now reported to this Meeting, amount to Eight Thousand Six Hundred and Fifty-eight Pounds; about One Thousand Pounds of which consist of distraints for the late assessment for manning the navy: the rest, as usual, are chiefly for Tithes, and demands of a similar nature. The amount of sufferings brought in from Ireland is Two Thousand Three Hundred and Three Pounds. And as we are informed that an opinion publickly prevails, that the purpose of these accounts is in order that the sufferings may be reimbursed, we desire Friends every where, as occasion may offer, to contradict this opinion, which hath no foundation in truth.

The Friends mentioned in our last epistle to be imprisoned on account of our testimony against tithes, still remain prisoners in the county gaol at York; objects themselves, as well as their afflicted families, of the sympathy of their fellow-professors; to whose lot it hath not fallen to experience a treatment so rigorous.

We

We have this year received epiſtles from our Friends of the Yearly Meetings of North and South Carolina and Georgia, of Virginia, of Pennſylvania, of New York, and of New England, evincing their continued concern to ſupport our teſtimonies, and our Chriſtian diſcipline. The inhabitants of the Continent, dwelling in fertile regions once poſſeſſed by different tribes of the Indian natives, are doubtleſs bound to regard them with benevolence: accordingly, we find our Friends engaged in an undertaking to furniſh them with ſome of the comforts of civilized life. A fund is raiſing to ſupply the expenſe of inſtructing them in agriculture, in mechanick arts, and in ſome uſeful branches of learning.

On examining into the ſtate of our Society in theſe nations, we find cauſe to believe that, in many parts, the attention of Friends is gradually fixing, more and more cloſely, on the excellence of the ſeveral teſtimonies which we are required to bear: and we are perſuaded that, were our members univerſally more looſened in their affections from the profits and the friendſhips of the world, the ſtandard of Truth would be more conſpicuouſly and availingly diſplayed.

Let us conſider, Brethren, what is the cauſe of our diſſent from the prevailing opinions and practices of the age. Is it not that we moſt ſurely believe that our faith is more conſiſtent with the evangelical purity of the primitive times; and our manners leſs liable to promote an attachment to a world that paſſeth away? How then ſhall we ſet the candle, that hath been thus mercifully lighted in any of us, under the bed or the buſhel; giving up any part of our teſtimony, be it ever ſo ſmall, for the ſake of eaſe, or of outward advantage?

The beloved Apoſtle declared that "God is Light, and in Him "is no darkneſs at all." A manifeſtation of this divine light, in infinite mercy, is given to every man, to lead him out of the miſery of fallen nature, unto the Eternal Fountain of Life and Light. In every heart, and in every ſociety of people, in which place is given to any kind of unrighteouſneſs, an eclipſe of the light neceſſarily follows as far as the compliance with evil extends; and, if this ſtate be continued in, ſpiritual death muſt enſue. Wherefore, brethren, in your conduct as individuals, and in the part which ye take in the exerciſe of the diſcipline eſtabliſhed amongſt us, be ye animated to reſiſt every appearance of evil; remembering that, as our Heavenly Father cannot unite with darkneſs, ſo neither muſt thoſe unite with it, who deſire to attain fellowſhip with Him: in which fellowſhip our happineſs conſiſteth, both in time and in eternity.

In theſe times of worldly commotion, the concern ſtill remains with us, that our brethren may be preſerved from joining with any thing, that immediately or remotely conduces to promote it. And, although of late we have, from year to year, teſtified our deſire that Friends may take no part in that which genders ſtrife; we ſtill fear

fear all are not ſufficiently cautious, or ſenſible of the advantage of mixing as little as poſſible with the fluctuating politicks of the times. For, truly, were all concerned to work out their own ſalvation with fear and trembling, the mind would be preſerved on its proper centre; and to mix with the multitude, in their purſuit of the favourite object of any party, would be dreaded rather than deſired.

Reſpecting the Slave Trade, though we have no good tidings to proclaim, we feel unwilling to paſs it over in ſilence. As a body, we have been among the foremoſt to expoſe its turpitude; and, although it doth not appear at preſent to be our duty to take any publick ſtep as the advocates of this degraded claſs of our fellow creatures, we ſtill continue to view the commerce with unremitting abhorrence: and we much deſire that no one, once touched with a ſenſe of their complicated woe, may ſuffer its being thus dreadfully protracted, to efface the impreſſion from his memory, or ſympathy from his heart.

This Meeting hath been very large, and our minds have been much exerciſed in a travail for the cauſe of Truth. O, Friends of every deſcription, how would ye contribute, not only to your own peace as individuals, but to render our aſſemblies, under the ſanction of the great Maſter, ſeaſons of rejoicing, were ye all to be engaged in earneſt, each one for himſelf, to do away the hurtful and hindering things, which, ye muſt be ſenſible, are yet to be found within our borders!

Finally, dear Friends, remember the apoſtolick declaration, "The "foundation of God ſtandeth ſure, having this ſeal, The Lord "knoweth them that are his." Strive therefore to become ſuch, by obedience to his holy law. It hath been our uniform and conſtant teſtimony, that God hath vouchſafed his grace and good Spirit unto the children of men univerſally, as the means of their ſanctification. May ye therefore, in your ſeveral degrees of growth, evince and recommend your belief in it, by dwelling under its holy influence.

Again, in goſpel affection, we ſalute you, and bid you farewel.

Signed in and on behalf of the Meeting, by

ROBERT FOWLER,

Clerk to the Meeting this Year.

Yearly Epiſtle,
1796.